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A LITERARY FIRM OF TWO

JOY OF THE WILLIAMSONS IN THEIR NOVEL MAKING.

They could narrate even stranger adventures if they dared. Mrs. Williamson declares "The Lightning Conductor" due to an empty treasury.

Mrs. Alice M. Williamson, partner in that magnificent firm of romancers C. N. and A. M. Williamson, tells what the members of the firm think of themselves as a letter written to the *Book News Monthly*. In it she gives what she terms some dry facts to serve as a foundation for an otherwise fanciful erection.

To begin with the cornerstone of that foundation, the authors' acquaintance with each other, she writes that they laid a nearly fifteen years ago, when Alice Williamson went over to England for a visit armed with various letters of introduction for herself and her American friends. One of those letters was to Charles Norris Williamson, then one of the youngest among the editors and founders of an important London weekly paper. She sent the letter, and he, because of illness in his family, did not call.

So thought Englishmen rude creatures. He forgot the American young woman's existence. Then they met in an odd way which they might have written up afterward as one of their stories, because it was romantic and amusing. Immediately they became great friends and continues Mrs. Williamson, the first time they knew they were more than friends. So they decided to be married. And the next interesting thing that happened to them was a motor car. It was a dreadful little horror of a motor car, more like a bathtub than anything else; and they had desperate adventures in it in the streets of Surrey, where they lived in a queer little old farmhouse that had a smuggler's trapdoor in the drawing room floor.

But Surrey adventures, and indeed English adventures of all sorts, only excited their appetites for adventures further afield. They have spent about two-thirds of their time in seeing beautiful places in Europe and in Africa. They live in England in summer, when they live permanently anywhere, and have now built a house in the south of France among pines and olive trees, near the Mediterranean and near Mentone.

Their impressions about themselves are that they are extremely happy and lucky; for they love to write better than they love to do anything else, except perhaps to travel and have delightful, unexpected adventures. When they have come home from a long journey of several months they find themselves intensely to look through their notebooks, which bring back each incident as vividly as a story told by a novelist, and what the notebooks have out of the photographs supply.

Sometimes critics say that in their stories "the lightning conductors" make life appear too rose colored; that there is more romance and happiness in their pages than ever comes to flesh and blood heroes and heroines. But the Williamson firm does not agree with this verdict. They only dared to put into their books, they say, half the romantic things which happen to them and to people they meet in their travels, then indeed the critics might say that they laid on their colors with a lavish brush. But all the things that are so strange not to be true they actually leave out because nobody would believe them. And as for making the characters happy in the end, why not?

The authors think that the ending of a story, in real life or in fiction, depends upon the page on which it finishes. Out the narrative short at chapter fifteen and you may have a gloomy end. Carry it on to chapter twenty and the clouds may have rolled away. And it is a theory of theirs that happiness is not only a higher state of mind than sorrow but actually one more prevalent in the world, taking into account all the things they enjoy giving their good nature free play and supplying their characters the best with plenty of love and romance.

When they interested the lightning conductors more than any other they read until last spring was their first year in Africa, where they spent the next few months, sometimes traveling, sometimes in the Algerian desert with a motor car, sometimes going still further south to the hot country of the large sand dunes where a motor car would dare to go. They had all sorts of adventures among the Arabs and endured all sorts of hardships, every one of which they enjoyed immensely. And when they wrote the book which they themselves like better than any other they have written, "The Golden Silence."

Because they have seen a country which interests them as much if not more than California. At present they are in their minds and hearts are there, and they are to tell some of their impressions in a wonderful country.

Williamson, of all authors in the world, Frank N. Doubleday says, "is the most wonderfully optimistic and heartiest people that a publisher ever met." Mr. Doubleday speaks with authority, being their publisher.

They seem to rely on good luck, which is very fine, because good luck seems to follow them. When they were on the trip that culminated in "The Lightning Conductor" Mr. Williamson re-

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received a letter from London stating that a travel paper for which he was writing articles and taking photographs had stopped on account of a lawsuit. He was bitterly disappointed, as he had enjoyed the work and it had given an incentive to his first motor tour with his wife.

"With that post they had expected a good big check, and counting on it had spent all their money. There they were in Taormina, Sicily, at the best hotel, without a penny, Mr. Williamson feeling that 'Oh, hell! the occupation was gone.'"

"Well," said Mrs. Williamson, "let's have a splendid dinner and think things over."

"So they did and thought out 'The Lightning Conductor,' which they began that night. They used for it all the notes of travel and photographs which had been meant for the articles, in the dead magazine. And they fell so in love with Taormina while they were waiting for their check to turn up that they laid the last scenes of 'The Lightning Conductor' there.

"No optimism was justified, for if they had not got bad news at Taormina, 'The Lightning Conductor,' which gave the Williamson's success, would never have been written."

Mr. Doubleday once took an automobile journey with the authors and describes how they go about getting stocked up.

"There is no road, river, church or scene in which they are not genuinely and enthusiastically concerned," he says. "They are eager to find out all about everything; and when an inexperienced traveler is riding with them they will stop and ask questions and they will fairly glow with the information they are about to impart and the things they are about to show."

When they conceived the idea of writing their latest book, "The Golden Silence," with the Algerian desert as its setting, they immediately set to work to have all the experiences that a traveler can have in the desert. They made a long journey by automobile through the sands of the Sahara south to Biskra and Touggourt. They went on from there to El Oued by camel and lived in the desert for several months.

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W. F. GREENE
SOMERVILLE, N. J.

GUY SCULL AT THE FIRE.

Literary Career Started After His Discharge by a Newspaper.

"You'd expect to find Guy Scull hunting grizzlies with a lance rather than shooting quail or catching clams," said one of his friends apropos of Mr. Scull's new book, "Lassoing Wild Animals in Africa," an account of his adventures with Buffalo Jones' hunting expedition on which a lion and a rhino were roped. "You see, Scull has always been one of those chaps who'd up and beat it across the world, starting between two days. Never any difficulty for him to hear the call of the wild."

"I remember that after the Spanish-American war, in which he served with the Rough Riders, he started work as a reporter with an evening newspaper. He got along all right for a while and then he confided to me one night that he was a drudge and he knew he was a drudge, and he was strongly thinking of either buying an apple orchard in Oregon or becoming an anarchist. He had all kinds of money, didn't need to do newspaper work if he didn't want to."

"Well, he was sent out to cover a fire near South Ferry. It was pretty big and we wanted the stuff. Never a word came from him and it got late. I hiked down to find him, after phoning all over, and I found him all right. Sure. There he was, sitting on the stringpiece of a wharf smoking a cigarette, dangling his legs over the water and looking out to sea as though he was seeing fine young visions."

"How about that fire?" I suggested.

"Fire? Scull says. 'Me monkey with a fire? Why, man, look out there, see those tramp steamers beating it out to sea? They're going to the South Seas. Me for that!'"

"Oh! I said. 'Then it'll be another kind of fire for you, my son.'"

"Eats," he says, and then he started talking.

"He's the most silent, secretive man in the world ordinarily, but he soon had me seeing nautch girls and the Waikiki beach and pearl fishers and all sorts of purple things."

"Well, when we got back to the office they just fired him. We all shook our heads and said it was a good thing he had an income, because he was certainly a frost as a newspaper man."

"Next thing we knew the Boer war broke out, and being as Scull had had experience in the Spanish war soldiering he managed to get a job as war correspondent. We all grinned and were glad he wasn't representing our paper. But he began sending in corking dispatches. Then I'll be hanged if Guy Scull wasn't the first correspondent to get into Ladysmith, hiking in with the relief expedition, and sending out a wonder of a story about the town and its defenders."

"Next thing was the Russo-Jap war, and the fellow that had been dressing on the stringpiece was one of the very few correspondents that ever got into Manchuria. He sent a Chicago paper and its affiliated sheets some corking good stories, and he was one of the few that ever sent back any real first hand news. His picture made were wonders too, like the descriptions of the yell he had in 'Lassoing Wild Animals.' He got taken down with dysentery over in Manchuria, but he kept on going."

"And we haven't stopped explaining why he was fired from our paper even yet!"

CRANFORD

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